



North Dakota Department of Health

NEWS RELEASE

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Public Health Week Celebrated April 5 Through 11

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. John Hoeven has proclaimed April 5 through 11, 2004, as *Public Health Week* in North Dakota.

Eliminating Health Disparities: Communities Moving from Statistics to Solutions is the theme of this year's campaign, which focuses on implementing interventions that guarantee quality care for all.

"Illness and death often strike certain groups of North Dakotans harder than others," said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D. "Factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, education, income, disabilities, rural locations or sexual orientation all can raise barriers to accessing quality health care and preventive health services."

According to the North Dakota Department of Health, health disparities have a profound impact on the quality of life and the life expectancy of North Dakota citizens. Such disparities often are caused by:

- **Gender.** In North Dakota, men are more prone to sexually transmitted infections and are less likely to access sexuality and reproductive services. Women are more affected by domestic violence, sexual abuse and other forms of abuse. In addition, they are more likely to lack medical and dental insurance, as well as resources or funds for mental health and substance abuse services.
- **Race and ethnicity.** American Indians in North Dakota are less likely to be screened for many preventable conditions. In addition, they often lack access to preventive health care and quality health-care services.
- **Income and education.** In 2002, there were 67,000 uninsured persons and 15,000 uninsured children in North Dakota. A lack of health insurance affects a person's access to health care, specialty services, medication and dental care.

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- **Rural localities.** Forty-eight of North Dakota's 53 counties are considered rural, and 47 are designated as either Health Professional Shortage Areas or Medically Underserved Areas. Long distances to medical care – as well as shortages of emergency medical services due to a limited volunteer workforce and recruitment barriers – impact the rural population.
- **Sexual orientation.** Gay men have higher incidences of sexually transmitted diseases, certain cancers, substance abuse, depression and suicide. Lesbians are more likely to be overweight or obese, have higher stress levels and have higher smoking rates.
- **Disabilities.** Many people who have disabilities have lower rates of physical activity and higher rates of obesity. They often lack access to health and medical services.

According to Dwelle, North Dakota is taking steps to close the gaps in health disparities through the following initiatives:

- The statewide *Healthy North Dakota* Health Disparities Committee recently was established to study barriers to health care and to make policy recommendations.
- A State Health Planning survey is underway to determine how many North Dakotans are both uninsured and underinsured.
- The Governor's Health Insurance Advisory Committee is looking at options to increase health care access for all North Dakotans.

"The elimination of health disparities is essential to ensuring a healthy population," Dwelle said. "That's why we must continue to identify and create innovative strategies to help every North Dakotan access health care and, ultimately, live a long and healthy life."

For more information about Public Health Week, contact Kelly Carlson, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.252.8130. For more information about becoming involved with the *Healthy North Dakota* initiative, contact Melissa Olson, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4908.

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**PROCLAMATION
Public Health Week
April 5 through 11, 2004**

WHEREAS, public health activities protect North Dakotans from infectious and chronic diseases, environmental and workplace hazards, unintentional injuries and violence; and

WHEREAS, public health programs and services benefit everyone regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status and are essential to a strong, successful health system; and

WHEREAS, public health strives to eliminate inequality in personal health, health-care utilization and health-care access and works to inspire people who want to reduce health disparities in their communities; and

WHEREAS, educating people about the benefits of healthy behaviors is an essential element in attaining good health and preventing premature illness and death; and

WHEREAS, state and local public health agencies and the citizens of North Dakota are encouraged to celebrate and acknowledge the many benefits of public health.

NOW, THEREFORE, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim April 5 through 11, 2004, as **PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK** in the state of North Dakota.

John Hoeven
Governor